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ABSTRACT

The growing awareness that women have their own identities and rights has led to sweeping legal actions to reduce discrimination and, more importantly, to a different social attitude toward women. This study is directed toward the examination of the effects of this changing attitude toward women among a group of college students in eastern North Carolina. Subjects were 171 male and female students, mainly freshmen and sophomores, from East Carolina University. Results indicate: (1) males are more liberal than females in their attitudes toward women; (2) mothers appear to have a greater influence over their sons' attitudes toward women than over their daughters' attitudes; and (3) attitudes toward women are related to many significant future plans both in the family domain and in the job domain. This relationship holds true for both males and females. (Author)

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Antecedents and Effects of Attitudes Toward Women Among College Students

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Recently considerable attention has been given to changing patterns of women's roles in present-day society. The growing awareness that women have their own identities and rights has led to sweeping legal actions to reduce discrimination, but more importantly, it has led to a different attitude toward women. This study was directed toward the examination of the possible effects of the changing attitude toward women among a group of college students in Eastern N. C. Specifically, the following issues were examined: (1) What factors contribute to differences in the attitude toward women? (2) Does one's conceptualization of the feminine role influence his/her present academic accomplishment and interests? (3) Does the conceptualization of the feminine role influence a college student's future plans?

To answer these questions, an exploratory study was designed to include the collection of data in four areas: (1) present attitudes toward women; (2) background variables; (3) present achievement and values; and (4) future aspirations and plans. The attitude toward women was measured by the Attitudes Toward Women Scale developed by Spence, et al. (1973). This scale has been widely used in recent research dealing with females and has shown satisfactory validity and reliability. The other three areas of information were obtained from a questionnaire constructed by the present investigators. The background variables included among others, parental education and occupation, and geographical location. Present achievement was represented by grade point average and academic major. Present values include religious participation and one's belief in how much control one has over one's life as measured by Levenson's Internal, Powerful Others, and Chance Scales. Future aspirations and plans included: whether planning to get married; plans to have children, vocational intentions, plans on futhering education, and perceptions on how the subject anticipated their marriage would operate.

A total of 171 male and female students (51 males and 120 females) from East Carolina University served as subjects. Students were mainly freshmen and sophomore students from various disciplines taken from Introductory Psychology classes. During regular class sessions, Spence's, et al. (1973) Attitudes Toward Women Scale, Levenson's, 1972, "Internal, Powerful Others, and Chance Scales" (I.P.C. Scale) and an information questionnaire were administered to volunteer students. Levenson's scale is a refinement of Rotter's I-E Scale. A high score on Levenson's I Scale indicated that the subject believes he has control over his own life; a low I Scale indicates the subject believes he does not have control over his own life. A high P score indicates the subject believes powerful others have control over his life; a low score indicates that the subject believes powerful others do not have much control over his life. A high C score indicates that the subject believes chance forces (luck) control his life; whereas, a low C score indicates the subject believes chance forces do not control his life.

A summary of the results is as follows:

1. Sex differences on attitudes toward women

Males were more liberal than females in their attitudes toward women. There was no significant Internal, Powerful Others, or Chance differences between the male and female subjects. (See Table 1).

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and t values on I, P, and C*

		$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t	P
ATW	Male	32.49	7.64	2.80	<.05
	Female	28.93	7.13		
I	Male	37.78	4.75	1.49	NS
	Female	36.54	5.31		
P	Male	24.65	5.97	-1.22	NS
	Female	25.87	5.85		
C	Male	22.80	6.40	-0.78	NS
	Female	23.66	6.71		

*The higher the score on I, the more internally oriented
The higher the score on P and C, the more externally oriented

2. Possible antecedents of attitudes toward women (See Tables 2 & 3)

Females: Parent's income and the size of the high school attended were negatively related to the attitudes toward women. The higher the female's family income and the larger the high school attended, the more conservative the female's attitudes were toward women.

Males: The larger the male's home town the more liberal the ATW, only children and eldest children were more liberal, as were males whose mother's had a higher education. Employment by the male's mother and her full-time employment were also related to more liberal ATW.

3. Present correlates with attitudes toward women

Females: The female's attitude toward women was negatively related to how frequently the females attend church, the less she attended church the more liberal her attitude. The female's attitude toward women was also related to a female's belief in how much control she felt she has over her life. The more internal the female felt, the more conservative was her attitude toward women.

Males: The male's attitudes toward women were related to their academic major as well as how susceptible he feels he is to influence by powerful others. Males in non-traditional majors had more liberal ATW scores, whereas males feeling more external control also has more liberal attitudes toward women.

4. Future plans and attitudes toward women

Females: The female student's liberal attitude toward women was related to her certaincy she would go on to further education beyond college, her certaincy she will get a job, and the time when she wants to look for a job. The attitude was also related to whether she believes her working will be harmful to family life and how she feels about sharing household chores with her spouse. Women who believed work outside the home was not harmful and women who believed household chores should be equally shared by working spouses, had more liberal attitudes toward women.

Males: Attitudes toward women are related to the male student's choice of occupation and whether he believes he has the ability for the chosen occupation. It is also related to whether he believes that a working wife will be harmful to family life, his willingness to let his wife work, and his belief he should share household chores with his working spouse.

The results of this study suggested several points of interest:

(1) Males are more liberal than females in their attitudes toward women; (2) mothers seem to have a greater influence over their sons than their daughters in their attitudes toward women; (3) compared to previous studies (Spence, et al, 1973), there seems to be a very traditional, conservative pattern for most of our subjects--especially for the females. This may be due to the geographical location and traditional orientation of Eastern N. C.; (4) attitudes toward women are related to many significant future plans both in the family domain and in the job domain, and this relationship holds true for both males and females; (5) most of the conventional "background" variables (H.S., G.P.A., father's background, siblings) did not relate to the attitudes toward women, so efforts should be made to look at other areas to seek possible antecedents of one's attitude toward women.

Table 2

Variables significantly related to ATW in males*

Antecedent Indices	Significance Level
Size of home town	-.031
Position in the family	.035
Mother's education	-.025
If mother worked fulltime while student grew up	.050
If mother worked	.050
Present Indices	
Frequency of church attendance	-.027
Selected academic major	.050
P (Powerful Others)	.003
Future Indices	
Perspective choice of occupation	.021
Feeling of capability for chosen occupation	.016
Working	
Perception that working wife is harmful to family life	-.020
Perception as to if he willing to let wife work	.011
Feeling of his sharing household duties with spouse	-.001

*ATW was scored in the liberal direction, the higher the score the more liberal the attitude toward women.

Table 3

Variables significantly related to ATW in females*

Antecedent Indices	Significance Level
Parents income	-.014
Size of high school attended	-.024
Present Indices	
Frequency of church attendance	-.001
I (Internality)	-.042
Future Indices	
Expectancy to further education beyond Batchelors	.003
Expectancy of getting a job	.008
Time span of when to seek employment	.049
Expectancy whether her working be harmful to her family life	.001
Her feelings toward sharing household duties with spouse	-.001

*ATW was scored in the liberal direction, the higher the score the more liberal the attitude toward women.

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